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LETTER DATED 18 JANUARY 2000 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF BURUNDI TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit herewith the statement by the Government of Burundi on the question of protected sites (see annex).

I should like this statement to be brought to the attention of all members of the Security Council and to serve as a document of the Council.

(Signed) Marc NTETURUYE
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Statement by the Government of Burundi on protected sites, issued at Bujumbura on 17 January 2000

The Government of the Republic of Burundi calls the attention of national and international public opinion to the following:

- The measures taken to place people in protected sites have in all cases had one objective: to protect the civil population, who are often used by the rebels as human shields in the event of contact with units of the national army, and to protect people from being massacred by the rebels.

- These measures have already borne fruit in the provinces of Bubanza, Kayanza, Karusi and rural Bujumbura.

- In the particular case of the province of rural Bujumbura, such measures have two features:

  - They constitute a response to the sufferings of the population, who were regularly subjected to plunder and held to ransom by the rebels;

  - They are temporary, since they will be lifted as soon as the security situation becomes stabilized.

The security dimension must be borne in mind as a matter of priority, but must nevertheless be constantly evaluated.

- With regard to the province of rural Bujumbura, the inhabitants go about their daily tasks, including work in the fields, and there is near-normal functioning of schools, health centres and markets.

- The Government undertakes to conduct an overall assessment of the protected sites with a view to progressively dismantling them.

- In addition to the government delegations which each week have visited the various protected sites to evaluate people's needs and to ensure the necessary follow-up, the President of the Republic this week convened a special session of the National Assembly with a view to, inter alia, setting up a parliamentary commission to inquire into the state of health of those people who have been regrouped and transferred to protected sites.

- Given the current evolution of the security situation in the province of rural Bujumbura, the Government will in two weeks' time begin dismantling the protected sites wherever it considers that conditions for doing so exist. This will be carried out in a fully transparent manner.

- The Government reaffirms that the regrouping of people in protected sites is not connected with any policy designed to coerce them in any way whatsoever.

Indeed, the Government of Burundi is fully aware that, in accordance with its international obligations, it cannot order the civilian population to move for reasons relating to conflicts except where this is dictated by the people's security needs or by overriding military considerations.

With regard to the living conditions of those who have been regrouped, the Government has guaranteed them to the best of its ability, and will continue to seek support from its partners in order to provide the necessary assistance to those still in protected sites.

The Government takes this opportunity to reiterate the urgency of convincing all armed factions to come to the negotiating table so as to cease hostilities, provide the population with a minimum level of security, and thereby avoid the need for protected sites.

- As security conditions improve, the regroupment sites will be closed.

- The Government of Burundi, engaged as it is in the peace process, hopes that this will succeed without delay.

- For the Government and people of Burundi, the successful outcome of the peace process will mean the restoration of peace, the return of the refugees and their reintegration, the reinstallation of displaced persons and the rehabilitation of the socio-economic life of the country.

- The Government earnestly appeals to the international community to support this wide-ranging programme, the ultimate aim of which is the reconciliation of the Burundian people and the reconstruction of the country.